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# Executive Summary

The Washington State department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages the 91,560-acre Capitol State Forest, which is located in Thurston and Grays Harbor Counties, minutes from the state's capitol in Olympia. The forest lies within the DNR's Pacific Cascade Region, which extends from Olympia south to the Columbia River, from the crest of the Cascades west to the Pacific Ocean. Capitol State Forest is a working landscape, managed for timber production, wildlife habitat, recreation and public access. However, public access and recreation opportunities must be compatible with overall forest management objectives to be permitted within the forest landscape.

In 2000, DNR received two NOVA grants from the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation (IAC) to assist the department in conducting a planning effort for the recreation aspects of Capitol State Forest. The purpose of the planning effort was to evaluate the current recreation use, provide direction for a desired future, and guide the wise use of limited resources. In addition, the completion of this plan is required to support the department's ability to compete for future IAC grant funds.

The planning process, which was conducted from January 2001 through August 2004, was undertaken by DNR staff and a 17-member citizen-working group. The Citizen Working Group's recommendations were used to help develop the recreation management strategies and objectives outlined in Part II. The plan is divided into three parts:

## **Part I: Background**

- The Land
- Recreation opportunities
- Capitol State Forest volunteer program

## **Part II: Recreation management goals and strategies**

## **Part III: Public participation**

## **Part I: Background**

This section of the plan outlines the background for managing recreation in the Capitol State Forest. It describes the characteristics of the land, the current recreation issues and challenges, future recreation opportunities, and volunteer involvement.

The Capitol State Forest, with its diverse recreational opportunities, is an area where multiple-use flourishes and public interest is reflected in the thousands of volunteer hours contributed each year by recreation clubs, organizations and individuals.

DNR manages the Capitol State Forest as a "working forest." The department, by law, has a responsibility as manager of the land to produce

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revenue for trust beneficiaries, such as schools and counties, while protecting natural resources. DNR must balance this responsibility with the public interest, which includes providing recreational opportunities and access, where appropriate.

The growth in population in Thurston and Grays Harbor Counties, as well as throughout the state, has put pressure on agencies that manage public lands to provide increased access for recreational use. Public access is also heightened as many private landowners restrict access of their land to the general public because of increased damage caused by inappropriate use.

## **Part II: Recreation management goals and strategies**

The Capitol State Forest's recreation management emphasis is to provide connectivity throughout the landscape via its motorized and non-motorized trail systems. Capitol State Forest also provides trailheads, primitive camping opportunities, day-use, and picnicking areas. The recreation program in DNR's Pacific Cascade Region provides: maintenance of facilities and trails, securing of grant funding and administration, volunteer activities coordination, oversight of organized group events, campground host recruitment and training, and education and enforcement.

The vision of Capitol State Forest's recreation program is to provide a safe environment where people can enjoy a primitive recreation experience in a natural forest setting, while protecting natural resources and trust assets.

Four goals for the management of recreation and public access in Capitol State Forest were developed through the planning process:

- Goal 1: Provide a diverse spectrum and sustainable level of landscape uses
- Goal 2: Ensure recreation is consistent with trust and ecological goals
- Goal 3: Support safe recreation opportunities
- Goal 4: Pursue sustainable funding resources and staff for managing recreation and public access in Capitol State Forest

These four goals are the backbone of the strategies and objectives listed below and found in detail in Part II. Management strategies for each facility is outlined in Appendix H.

- Recreation facilities management strategies and objectives
- Recreation trails management strategies and objectives
- Dispersed recreation management objectives
- Target shooting management strategies and objectives
- Hunting management strategies and objectives
- Organized events management strategies and objectives
- 4x4 vehicles management objectives

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## Part III: Public participation

Public participation in the planning process was an integral part of creating this plan. Public outreach methods included:

- External information gathering from a variety of sources
- Distribution of recreation user surveys
- Formation of a Citizen Working Group

The Citizen Working Group, known as the Rock Candy Team, was composed of 17 individuals with varying levels of recreation involvement within the Capitol State Forest. The role of the working group was to provide information and recommendations regarding recreation in Capitol State Forest. Working closely with DNR staff, this group worked extensively to understand the scope of the current program—DNR’s trust obligations and the intricacies that exist in managing a “working forest.”

The management strategies outlined in this plan merge the recommendations of this citizen team, feedback from the survey and other outreach, and direction from agency management. This broad spectrum of participation assures that the needs and interests of recreation users, neighbors and the department are represented in this plan.

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information about the history of the Capitol State Forest, detailed public outreach information, site and trail inventories and sustainable management criteria are included in the appendices.

